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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

25X1



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
14 November 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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25X1

~~TOP SECRET~~

Page Denied

14 November 1965

HIGHLIGHTS

Heavy fighting broke out in the vicinity of the Plei Me Special Forces camp in Pleiku Province over the weekend. VC units estimated at company size attacked the command post of the Air Cavalry Division's Third Brigade on the 13th, and on the 14th elements of the US First Cavalry Division clashed with VC main force units about six miles from the Cambodian border.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Heavy fighting between US troops and an estimated Viet Cong battalion erupted again today in heavily contested western Pleiku Province near the Plei Me Special Forces camp (Para. 1). Enemy attacks were directed against a command post of the US First Cavalry Division in Pleiku Province and against division headquarters in Binh Dinh Province early yesterday (Para. 2). Viet Cong activity elsewhere during the past two days remained at a high level (Para. 3). A major US/ARVN search-and-clear operation--BLUE MARLIN--was terminated on 12 November with very light enemy contact reported (Para. 4). US B-52 Stratofortresses struck two targets in Binh Long Province early yesterday; information is not yet available on a scheduled ground follow-up (Para. 5). The Ben Hai River bridge and adjacent area in the Demilitarized Zone was bombed again yesterday; preliminary evidence points to the involvement of US carrier-based aircraft (Para. 6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Premier Ky's return to Saigon was delayed yesterday by plane trouble; before leaving South Korea, Ky reiterated in a press conference his opposition to any peace negotiations (Para. 1).

Recent US Embassy conversations with Vietnamese Catholic leaders tend to confirm growing Catholic disenchantment with the present Saigon regime (Para. 3).

25X1

25X1

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

[REDACTED] A US Navy Skyhawk and a Marine helicopter downed by ground fire 30 miles north of DMZ (Para. 3). ROLLING THUNDER 39 damaged three railway/highway bridges south and east of Hanoi (Para. 5) and a SAM support facility southwest of Hanoi (Para. 6). The US lost six aircraft, two helicopters, and a drone during the period 5-11 November (Para. 7).

25X1

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V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi propaganda is trying to counter any impression that VC are not winning the war (Paras. 1 through 4). Liberation Front representative is visiting Rumania (Para. 5).

25X1

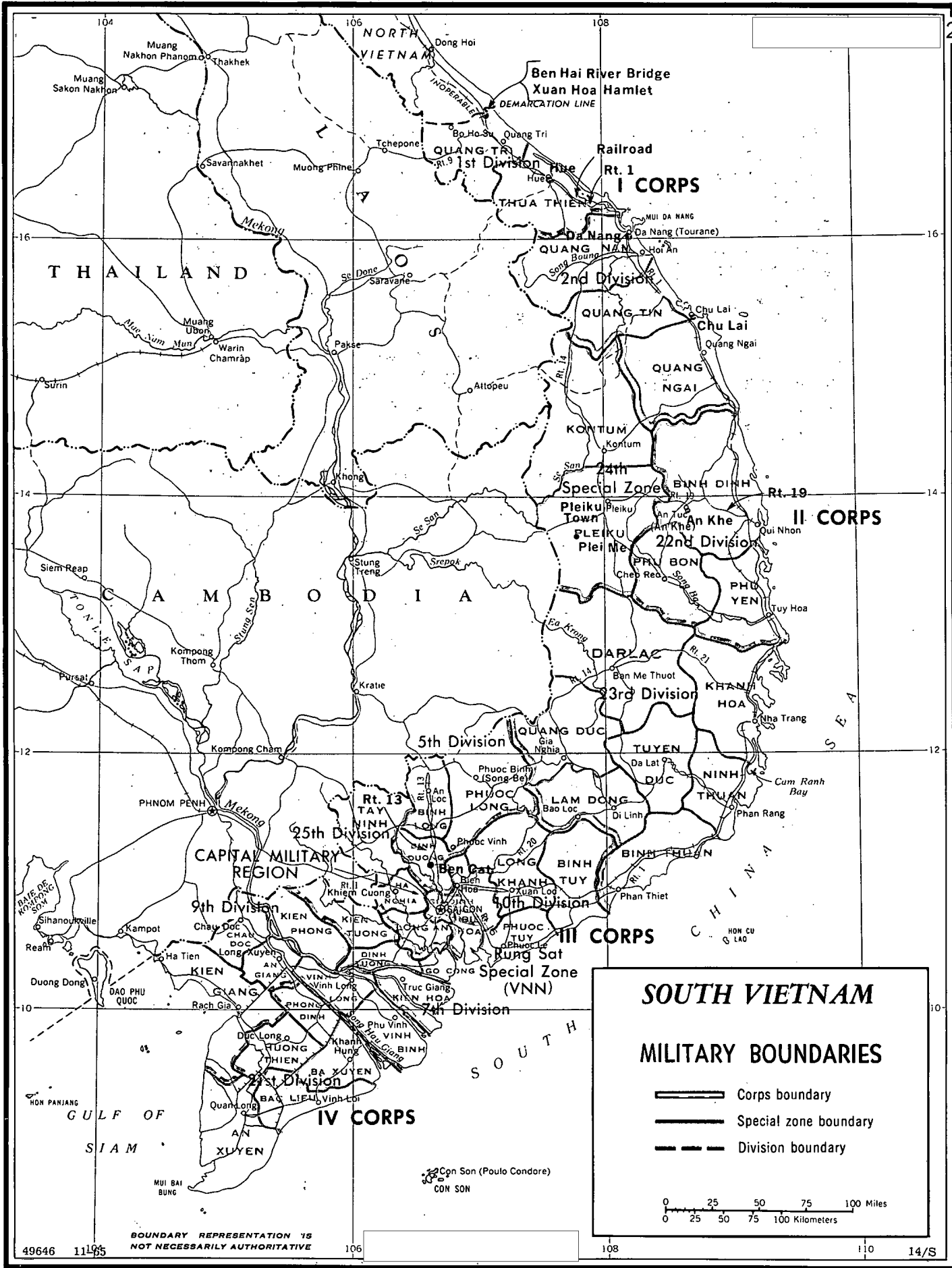
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25X1

14 November 1965

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25X1



I. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Heavy fighting flared again today west of the Plei Me Special Forces camp in Pleiku Province between US troops and an estimated Viet Cong main force battalion. Elements of the US First Cavalry Division established contact with the enemy unit during the afternoon hours of 14 November (Saigon time) approximately six miles from the Cambodian border, and fighting was reported continuing at nightfall. Initial reports list 90 Viet Cong killed (20 confirmed by body count) thus far; US casualties total eight killed and 18 wounded. Two US helicopters and one Skyraider aircraft have also been shot down by enemy ground fire in the vicinity of the fighting. The helicopter crews were recovered safely, but the fighter pilot is presumed dead. US reinforcements have been dispatched to the scene.

2. A few miles farther north, an estimated company of Viet Cong early yesterday attacked the command post of the Air Cavalry Division's Third Brigade located 12 miles southwest of Pleiku town. Enemy attackers directed a mortar and automatic weapons barrage on the post at the same time that an attempt was being made to penetrate the helicopter landing strip with demolition charges. The attackers were driven off after a half hour of fighting. US losses were seven killed, 17 wounded, and three helicopters moderately damaged. Viet Cong casualties were unknown. A few hours earlier, at least three Viet Cong were killed while probing the defensive perimeter of the Air Cavalry Division's base camp at An Khe in Binh Dinh Province. No US casualties were reported during this incident, although a nearly simultaneous enemy attack on two division trucks traveling along Highway 19 east of the camp did result in light US casualties.

3. Elsewhere, over-all enemy activity during the past two days remained at the high level of recent weeks, and included several incidents of sabotage directed against the railroad and adjacent

14 November 1965

I-1

25X1

Highway 1 north of Da Nang. Two railroad culverts were heavily damaged during the night of 12-13 November about 15 miles southeast of Hue; three railway cars filled with rice were reportedly damaged earlier by another enemy mine detonation. Hidden Viet Cong mines and grenade traps also killed nine friendly force personnel and wounded 45 others on 12 November. A terrorist grenade explosion in the Saigon area wounded two policeman and six civilians.

4. On the Allied side, Operation BLUE MARLIN--a joint US/ARVN search-and-clear effort in the Chu Lai area--was terminated on 12 November with only very light enemy contact reported. The three-day, multibattalion operation resulted in two Viet Cong killed, 52 suspects detained, and three weapons seized; two US personnel were wounded. The interrogation of local villagers indicated that the Viet Cong in the operational area had had at least two days' prior notice of the operation, pointing up the continued security problem regarding large-scale military planning. In the past few days, three Vietnamese--two in Saigon and one in Da Nang--with access to sensitive information have been arrested as Viet Cong espionage agents.

5. Twelve Guam-based US B-52 Stratofortresses struck two adjacent targets early yesterday in Binh Long Province, 35 miles northwest of Saigon. Ground follow-up operations were scheduled, but no progress reports have yet been received.

6. Two jet aircraft--whose identities have not yet been fully confirmed by US military officials--made several bombing and strafing runs yesterday morning over the Ben Hai River bridge in the demilitarized zone dividing North and South Vietnam. One span of the bridge was damaged, and several buildings, including a Buddhist pagoda in the nearby South Vietnamese village of Xuan Hoa, were damaged. One South Vietnamese policeman was killed, and another policeman and two civilians were wounded. A broadcast over Hanoi radio today

14 November 1965

protested the damaging of several buildings on the northern side of the river. USMACV has reported that preliminary evidence points to the involvement of two US carrier-based aircraft, although a thorough investigation is still in progress. The bridge and adjacent village were also bombed accidentally by US aircraft on two successive days in September.

14 November 1965

I-3

25X1

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Premier Ky's scheduled return to Saigon yesterday from South Korea was delayed when his aircraft developed mechanical trouble in Taipei. At a press conference before leaving Seoul, Ky reiterated his opposition to any peace negotiations on Vietnam. According to a semiofficial Vietnamese press item, he declared that even should the Communists propose negotiations, they would only be following the Communist principle of "taking one step backward in order to take two steps forward." He also implied that he favored heavier bombing of North Vietnam.

25X1

3. Conversations with Vietnamese Catholic leaders last week further convinced US Embassy officers that a recent Catholic communiqué, admonishing the government not to neglect certain "nonmilitary" problems, reflects growing dissatisfaction with the Saigon regime. The Catholic leaders stated that they had presented chief of state General Thieu with a list of five specific grievances.

14 November 1965

II-1

25X1

They said that they had not publicized these grievances at this time, but left the impression that they might consider more overt forms of action if the government took no corrective action. The Catholics indicated that their concern is not so much over Thieu and Premier Ky as over a clique of officials--I Corps commander General Thi, Police Director Lieu, and at least two cabinet members--whom they suspect of being in league with Buddhist militant Tri Quang.

14 November 1965

II-2

25X1

Page Denied

III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

25X1

3. Enemy ground fire downed a US Navy A4E (Skyhawk) and a Marine helicopter attempting to recover the A4E pilot on the night of 12/13 November about 30 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. The helicopter crew has been rescued and search operations are continuing for the Navy pilot.

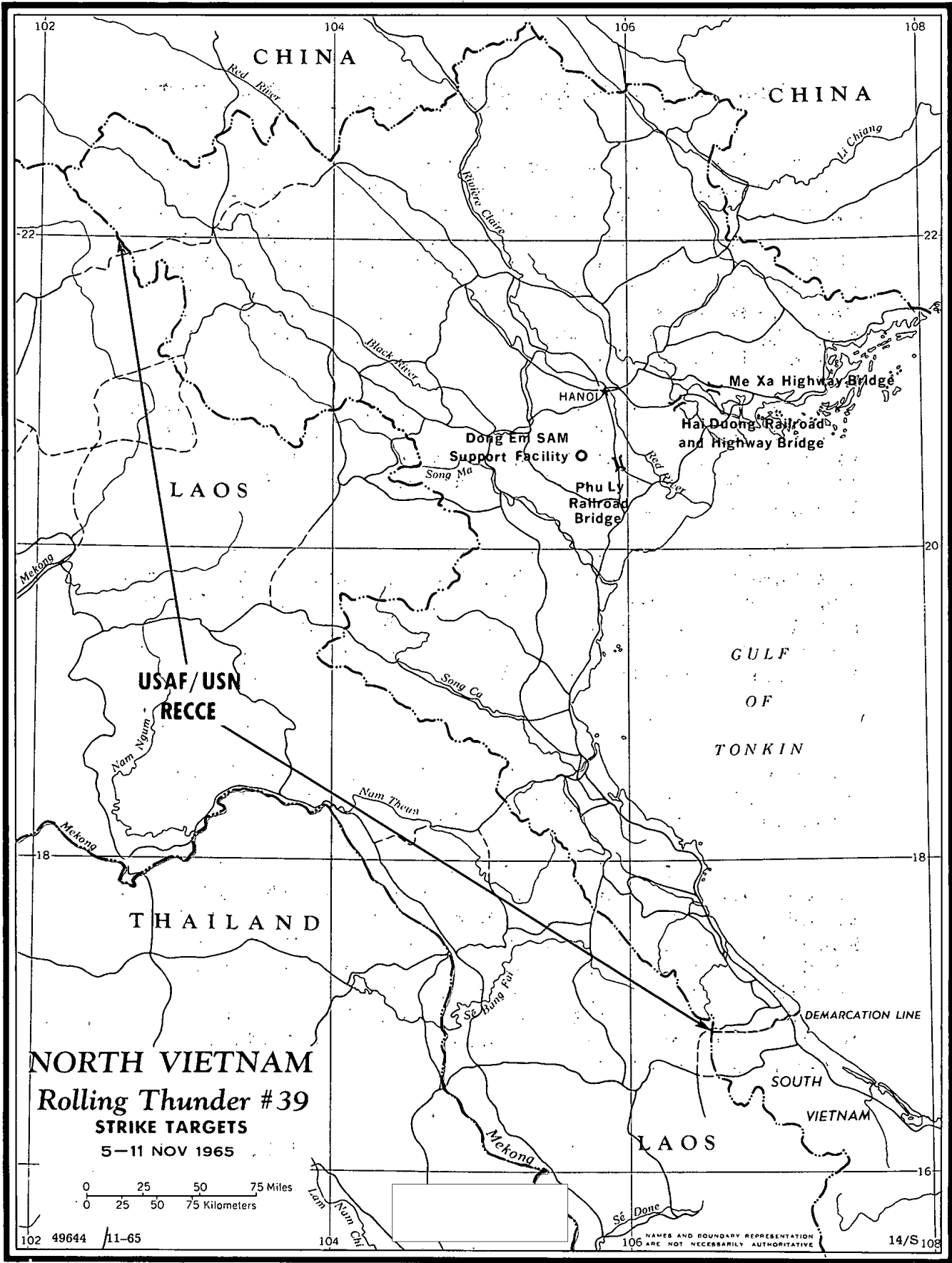
4. ROLLING THUNDER 39 operations conducted 5-11 November struck five primary targets and support aircraft destroyed considerable equipment at six SAM sites. Armed reconnaissance and leaflet drop missions were also conducted.

5. The Hai Duong rail and highway bridge located between Hanoi and Haiphong was hit on 5 November resulting in probable damage to the east span of the bridge. A bridge on the Phu Ly railroad connecting Hanoi and Vinh was struck on 7 November and two spans were reportedly dropped. On 8 November the eastern end of the Me Xa highway bridge located 15 miles northeast of Haiphong was moderately damaged.

14 November 1965

III-1

25X1



25X1

6. On 7 November the Dong Em SAM support facility southwest of Hanoi was struck by US aircraft and 35 of the 59 buildings were either destroyed or damaged.

7. The US lost six aircraft, two helicopters, and one drone during the period 5-11 November. The drone and a USAF F-105 Thunderchief were downed in the vicinity of Thanh Hoa by SAMs on 5 November. The two helicopters were brought down by ground fire on 6 November while conducting rescue operations. One crewman was killed in action, six were rescued, and the remainder are listed as missing in action. Total air losses through 11 November stands at 152.

14 November 1965

III-2

25X1



25X1

Page Denied

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. On 13 November Hanoi publicized the 12 November VC attack on the US First Infantry Division bivouacked near Route 13 in support of a ground follow-up operation near Ben Cat as "one of the biggest engagements to date between the Liberation Forces and American troops." Quoting Liberation press sources, the Communist account of the battle highlighted the fact that the VC initiated the engagement and boasted that more than a thousand US troops had been killed and 27 tanks and armored vehicles destroyed. However, US casualty figures on the Ben Cat engagement indicates 18 US killed and 11 armored personnel carriers destroyed or damaged. Confirmed VC losses, moreover, totaled 146 killed and 50 captured. The relatively quick propaganda reaction, the highlighting of the VC initiative, and the continued exaggeration of VC success may indicate that Hanoi feels it necessary to counter a growing impression--both in South Vietnam and abroad--that the Viet Cong are no longer winning the war.

2. North Vietnamese propaganda statements on the military situation in South Vietnam have manifested this concern several times recently. A party daily editorial published on 11 November charged that Western news reports are lying when they claim that the Viet Cong have suffered reverses since the "massive" buildup of US combat forces in South Vietnam. The editorial cited the recent battles at Plei Me and Bien Hoa, claiming them as proof that the Viet Cong are still fighting vigorously and are defeating large US units.

3. An article in the current issue of the fortnightly North Vietnamese English language journal Vietnam Courier also addressed itself to the theme that the Viet Cong are winning and that the input of US combat forces only accentuates the collapse of the South Vietnamese Army. The article stressed the point that "morale" is the deciding factor in

14 November 1965

V-1

25X1

determining the strength or weakness of an army. In this regard, it asserted, the Viet Cong are superior. The article admitted, however, that the fighting power of an army is also determined by a number of other factors such as the quality of its equipment and the tactical and technical standards of the army.

4. These three articles are the latest in a recent series, all apparently designed to counter any fear on the part of the Viet Cong or its supporters that the tide is running against them. Hanoi's insistence that morale is the "decisive" factor in determining the fighting ability of an army is probably aimed primarily at the Viet Cong. In addition, however, some recent articles appearing in the Eastern European press have been obliquely critical of Viet Cong military tactics, and Hanoi may feel that if bloc countries and left-wing supporters throughout the world begin to lose confidence in the VC, political and/or military support for the Vietnamese Communists will fall off.

5. In search for greater East European support, Liberation Front representative Tran Hoai Nam arrived in Rumania on 11 November, fresh from a visit to Poland where he succeeded in concluding an agreement to open an overseas Front office. All East European Communist countries except Rumania (and Yugoslavia) now have permanent Front representatives. Tran Hoai Nam was met on his arrival by representatives of "peace" and "friendship" groups, as is customary throughout the bloc, and he was also received at the Rumanian Foreign Ministry by two deputy foreign ministers.

14 November 1965

V-2

25X1

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~~TOP SECRET~~

TOP SECRET